

"I have found the content and depth of the course impressive," says Chris Shields, a student completing his PGCE at Durham University. Shields opted for the PGCE – a postgraduate certificate in education – instead of school-based teacher training.

So what is the difference between these two routes into teaching? A PGCE includes a combination of university lectures and several weeks in schools on a teaching placement. The courses are available through universities and colleges, either one year full-time or two years part-time.

The course content of a PGCE focuses on how to teach, rather than on subject content. Primary teachers are not expected to develop their subject knowledge beyond their degree. Topics taught include classroom management, adolescents and how they learn, special needs, and pastoral care. Students also learn about the latest research into education and how this applies in a classroom situation, something that is not included in school-based training. A full-time PGCE course runs for around 39 weeks, from September to June. Teaching placements increase in duration from two placements of four weeks – usually for three or four days a week – to 11 weeks in the final term. Universities have close links with local schools which work in partnership with them.

The PGCE course is open to graduates and there are no age restrictions: some universities enrol students



School-based training is a key part of the PGCE course ALAMY

The two routes to teaching

PGCEs can offer additional skills next to school-based training, finds **Glynis Kozma**

in their forties and fifties on PGCE courses: suitability and motivation are more important than age. Mature students can include those who are already teaching in universities or colleges. The University of Huddersfield has a history of providing lifelong learning, and was rated "outstanding" by Ofsted for its teacher training; many PGCE students are current lecturers of vocational subjects at the university.

If you are considering this route into teaching, your application is made through the Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR) between September and June. Entry requirements at institutions can vary: at Durham, whose PGCE course was rated "outstanding" recently by Ofsted, students require at least a 2:1 degree. In addition, a GCSE grade C, or its equivalent, in English and maths (and in science for primary teachers) is required by all universities and colleges. Applicants can apply to up to four institutions for teaching at secondary level, and two for primary level. Many universities receive more applications than they have places, so academic qualifications are only one part of the selection process. The GTTR recommends that applications are submitted by November for training starting the following autumn.

Students wanting to teach in primary schools can offer degrees in any subject. For secondary schools, demand is highest for teachers of English, maths, sciences, modern languages and computer science.

There may be some flexibility here: Sara Wood, a secondary English PGCE student at Durham, has a degree in American Studies. "There are students on my course who have degrees in drama, or experience in teaching English as an additional language, and this adds diversity to lectures," she says.

Huddersfield and Durham stress they are happy to consider engineering degrees from applicants who want to teach maths. But in addition to academic qualifications, most institutions expect applicants to have recent work experience in schools which demonstrates a genuine desire to work with children. Durham expects all applicants to have arranged two weeks' observation in a local school before they start their PGCE course in September.

Students have mixed reactions to school placements. One advantage of a PGCE course is that they gain teaching experience in a number of schools; the disadvantage is a lack of continuity with pupils. And PGCEs are more demanding than most undergraduate degrees, with longer working days and fewer holidays.

So why do some students choose a PGCE rather than other kinds of teacher training? One reason is that a PGCE is required for teaching at international schools outside the UK. Another is that applying for a PGCE rather than school-based training removes the anxiety of deciding which school to apply to, and perhaps choosing one that doesn't suit you.